PRIORITIZE QUICK WINS FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS

Mark David Jones

When I directed leadership initiatives for the 6,000 leaders at the Walt Disney World Resort, I encountered several trends in how these leaders reacted to challenges they faced—particularly when having to generate improvement momentum during challenging times. Being frequently overwhelmed, especially in the face of limited time and resources, resulted in a sense of not knowing what to do first, and when. This led to feeling "stuck." Leaders lost confidence in themselves and risked losing the confidence of their team members, too.

Three tools led to dramatic breakthroughs.

Like these leaders at Disney, unless you have a bullet-proof strategy and proven, practical tools to implement it, you'll barely keep up with the ever-changing demands of today's clinical operations. These three tools are driven by implementing consistent small wins that generate momentum and inspire confidence in your team to keep facing down the challenges you are dealt every day.

TOOL ONE: CATEGORIZE

Categorize and clarify the many demands competing for your attention (and that of your staff). We found the solution in the Eisenhower Matrix **(Figure 1)**. This time management tool was popularized by President Dwight "Ike" Eisenhower to use time as an investment towards what matters most by combining the two issues of urgency (how soon does the action need to occur?) and importance (how aligned is the action with the mission?).

As you can see in **Figure 1**, you can categorize responsibilities the following way:

• *Not Important & Not Urgent:* Distractions that don't advance your mission and often waste your time. Delete anything that doesn't add legitimate value.
• *Not Important and Urgent:* Tasks that must be done soon but don't directly link to your goals or require your specific skills. Delegate them when possible.
• *Important and Urgent:* Mission-critical tasks with clear deadlines and significant consequences for not taking action immediately. Do these now.
• *Important and Not Urgent:* Tasks without a firm deadline (making it easy to procrastinate) that strategically move you closer to your goals.

Once you have divided your tasks into these four categories, minimize the "Not Important" (less mission-focused) tasks by deleting and/or delegating them when possible. This may require helping those asking you to take on these actions understand it is not a good use of your time. The time and effort saved should be invested into the most strategically valuable *Important & Not Urgent* category—which typically includes activities such as planning, prevention mea-

Figure 1. The Eisenhower Matrix*

sures, relationship building, and innovation efforts. This approach sets up your team for superior outcomes and typically leads to fewer "firefighting" efforts required in the *Important & Urgent* category.

TOOL TWO: ORGANIZE

Brainstorm low- or no-cost solutions with your team, who are more aware of the details of your operation (and the patient experience) than anyone, so you can begin organizing them. There are many ways to generate ideas, but my personal favorite is "Continue-Stop-Start." Briefly, the process goes as follows:

- First ask your team to consider what you should *Continue*—things that are working well to create an extraordinary patient or staff experience. This helps people who are nervous about changes relax and be more open to supporting the needed improvement efforts. It's also important to note that this ensures you will not change something that is already working well enough (for now), which helps provide both a measure of stability as well as give your team the opportunity to be involved in the process— which leads to improved buy-in, ownership, and passion about supporting the change effort.
- Next is *Stop*: List the things you are currently doing that no longer serve your patient experience. Prepare to have a lengthy list and some interesting discussion here about assumptions, habits, and how to minimize wasted time and resources.

- Finally, the *Start* step: Brainstorm a list of things that are currently not happening but that you could begin doing to add value to the patient experience, while not negatively impacting the staff experience or the operational or financial situation.

TOOL THREE: PRIORITIZE

Most leaders make the mistake of focusing on the "sexy" ideas that come up—which are usually expensive and require budgetary approval or which are complicated, requiring multiple functions/steps to achieve. Pursuing changes with this method will usually take a long time—all the while keeping the team wondering "Whatever happened to that idea we had that leadership said they were going to implement?" That "wondering" eventually turns to frustration and feelings of betrayal—not exactly a formula for a healthy staff culture.

Instead, triage the ideas in order from "how easy it is to implement" to "how complicated it is to implement," with the intent to start your improvement efforts focusing on the fastest "wins." This is far superior to other methods that teams follow. When they start to see a pattern of "quick wins" (example: Idea #1 takes 1 day to achieve; Idea #2 three days to achieve; Idea #3 two weeks to achieve, etc.), it naturally generates momentum and enthusiasm that this change effort is "the real deal."

Bonus benefit #1: When people feel their ideas are heard, valued, and implemented, it "primes the pump" for them to share more valuable improvement ideas.

Bonus benefit #2: Even the most cynical person on the team will notice that "this approach is better" after four or five "quick wins" improvements have been implemented.

Bonus benefit #3: The constancy of engaging your team to generate improvement solutions will not only save money/resources and grow your business (better satisfied patients refer other patients!), but it will also shape your clinic culture to be more dynamic and growth-oriented for sustainable future success.

AND THE BEST PART?

You can use these three tools to improve your staff experience—which will transform your internal activities to position your team to best care for those you serve.

When you use these proven tools to set up your improvement efforts for success, you set the stage for making excellence easier and achieve your optimal potential—a fantastic way to begin a new chapter for your practice! *AE*

Mark David Jones (352-242-1234; MDJones@ SmallWorldAlliance.com) is a former Disney executive who now serves as president of Small World Alliance, Inc., a business management consulting firm (Orlando, Fla.) specializing in patient and staff engagement. He is the author of Lead With Your Customer: Transforming Culture and Brand into World-Class Excellence *(2nd edition).*

> "
> When you use these proven tools to set up your improvement efforts for success, you set the stage for making excellence easier, and achieve your optimal potential.